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Cannon in That Brink's Job Only a Twist in Arms Traffic

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The use of an anti-tank cannon to blow open a Brink's Co. safe in Syracuse, N.Y., is only a bizarre twist to the international traffic in military hardware than runs into billions of dollars every year.

The bulk of the arms production is generated by the United States, Soviet Russia, Communist China, France, Great Britain and West Germany. A United Nations report has pegged world spending on arms and munitions at \$130 billion last year.

Since 1950, this country has provided military arms and equipment to friendly countries in Europe and Asia at a total value of more than \$35 billion.

BUT THERE IS a clandestine side to the arms business that is rarely noticed by the public. Some of it is performed by government intelligence organizations, such as the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency or the British Intelligence Service, or those directed by the Kremlin. A great deal of the twilight arms traffic is done by international dealers, for big profits.

One of the biggest dealerships in the world is International Armaments Corp. (Interarmco), which has its warehouses in Alexandria, Va., just across the Potomac River from Washington. It was an Interarmco cannon which performed the Syracuse safe job.

Interarmco is run principally by Samuel Cummings, a 39-year-old North Philadelphian who lives in Monaco.

Cummings was touring Europe after World War II and came upon numerous stockpiles of abandoned and obsolete weapons. That discovery, it is said, gave him the idea of going into the business of buying and selling weapons on a large scale. Whether Cummings' brief career as a CIA weapons expert has anything to do with the business is open to conjecture.

IN ANY EVENT, operating under licenses by the State Department, Interarmco in the last 11 years has swung the following arms deals: Submachine guns and other hand weapons to Cuban dictator Batista and to the Castro revolutionaries at the same time; Swedish jet fighter aircraft to the Trujillo dictatorship, now ousted, in the Dominican Republic; Enfield rifles to Yugoslavia; former Nazi army machine guns to the West German government, and rifles to Kenya police to quell the Mau Mau rebels.

The company isn't talking about recent sales mainly because its customers would just as soon keep them quiet. But Interarmco officials contend they would be foolish to try to circumvent export controls of the U.S. Office of Munitions Control. Every foreign sale, they have insisted in testimony before Congress, is done under export licenses approved by the U.S. government.

Most big arms deals are Switzerland, and Brussels, Belgium, according to sources here.

SINCE World War II, the big market for weapons has been Africa and Asia, where newly-emerging countries or revolutionary groups have needed arms to achieve their demands. Algeria was a booming center for arms traffic before it finally gained independence from France. The Congo has been a good customer, too.

Because the State Department has banned private sales of arms to Latin America, Interarmco hasn't sold any there since 1959. But rival companies in other parts of the world apparently keep the revolutionaries supplied, particularly those with access to weapons from Communist countries.

Sometimes it is difficult to determine whether an arms deal is a recognized purchase, an illicit smuggling operation or part of an espionage plan.